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F. A. Tucker Inc. General Contractors Rutland Vermont



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F. A. Tucker General Contractors, Inc. was the primary contractor for the complete rebuild of the Weybridge Hydro Generating Station of Central Vermont Public Service. John Downey (CVPS Field Engineer) on the left joins Frank Tucker in this 29 September 1950 photo.

About the Author



DAVID ZSIDO

Young Zsido

David Zsido was born in Proctor. He is a graduate of Mount Saint Joseph Academy and Norwich University. He helped found the Green Mountain Bull Dawg Chapter of the Antique Truck Club of America in 1992 and has served as president of the chapter since. He is an avid collector of truck history and memorabilia, including antique trucks and equipment. He has authored "Antique Trucks: A Different Kind of Horsepower", "The Early Years of Company C 368th Engineer Battalion, U.S. Army Reserve In Rutland, Vermont", "The Secrets of Glen Garage", "Cinderella's Sweets" and

"The 486th Anti-Anything Battalion" for the Society.

Introduction

By many measurement standards F. A. Tucker Incorporated was a relatively small and somewhat obscure utility construction company. Although its business office was located in the City of Rutland for many years, few people know of or remember the role played by this general contracting firm in developing the Vermont electric grid and telephone network systems. Sadly there aren't very many veteran employees remaining as the company ceased operations in Vermont around the mid-1970s. This attempt to capture a portion of the F. A. Tucker history is based largely on the author's personal experience and research into a very limited amount of remaining historical data.

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F. A. Tucker Inc.

General Contractors

Rutland Vermont

By David G. Zsido

Frank A. Tucker was born in Addison, Vermont on 19 September 1899. During the period that preceded the United States entering World War I, Frank enlisted in the 1st Vermont Infantry, which ultimately became the 26th Infantry Division serving in action in France. After returning home, he married Genevieve Leggett, known to many as 'Tootsie', on 27 April 1920. They spent their lives together at her family's farmstead on Sheep Farm Road in Weybridge.

While it is unclear as to when he entered the utility construction business, Frank formally organized the company, which carried his name, in 1947. This is according to Articles of Association filed on 13 August 1947. These were amended on 8 May 8 and again on 28 December 1967. However, a photographic negative envelop identifies the two negatives contained therein, as being taken of an F.A. Tucker crew working in Rochester during the 1920s. While Frank maintained his business office in Rutland; initially at 38 Center Street on the second floor, he converted the farmstead in Weybridge into a maintenance shop; vehicle garages; and a heavy equipment lay-down area. On most mornings, Frank would likely walk through the yard to check on any crews that might be reporting in for the day. He would do so to assure that they would be headed out the gate in a timely fashion. Then he would typically drive to his Rutland office. He was a man of large stat-



DAVID ZSIDO

Rochester 1921

ure, who nearly always wore a suit and tie with a felt hat as a constant part of his wardrobe. In the 1960s and early 1970s his trademark automobile was a big black Cadillac. To many of his employees, he seemed to have a gruff nature, probably well nurtured by years of success and failures in the utility construction arena.

One of the first major jobs undertaken by F. A. Tucker was the complete rebuilding of Central Vermont Public Service Corporation's Weybridge hydroelectric facility in 1950. The project, located in Frank's home town, was only a few miles down the road from his maintenance shop. The project appeared to be extremely labor intensive as one photo of the Tucker work-force, which was involved with the reconstruction, shows a large contingent of employees.



DAVID ZSIDO

The F. A. Tucker workforce on 29 September 1950.

Tucker's superintendent was an individual named John Downing. Fortunately, there were a handful of photographs retained in the files of Central Vermont Public Service Corporation (CVPS), which helped to preserve some images of the people involved with this nearly \$1,000,000 upgrade and enhancement.

Detailed aspects of the project were contained in a written report in the New England Construction magazine of 15 November 1950. In a 'nutshell' the enhanced capacity of the output generation would increase from 500 to 3,000 kilowatts once the plant came on line. In the article, written by Martin N. Ralph, the value of the project was described as \$950,000. However, a subsequent newspaper article stated the project cost of \$850,000. According to a Burlington Free Press story, the major hydro upgrade would be completed in February of 1951. Another news story provided the details of a planned 'open house' on 4 September 1951.

A few years later in 1954, Frank and his company became involved with one of their first major high voltage utility lines projects. This transmission line extended through a corridor along the Champlain Valley from Milton to Middlebury.

It was in an era, when each and every pole had to be climbed by line-men, as aerial lifts, or bucket trucks as they are commonly called, had not been fully developed. Retired CVPS substation electrician, "Bud" Cox of Rutland, recalled that this job was his first as a Tucker employee. Once again, the CVPS files contained some photographs of Tucker crews at work. Some three years later, on 15 July 1957, as VELCO was bringing a power supply to the Rutland area; this time from the St. Lawrence Project in upstate New York, Tucker was once again employed to build the transmission line feed under the direction of CVPS. The 115,000 volt line would extend some twenty-five miles or so from Whitehall, NY to Rutland Town. The power line corridor, which had been cleared of all trees, was largely situated on the south side of U.S. Route 4; running along the sides of mountain slopes. It crossed through the towns of Fair Haven, Castleton, Ira, and West Rutland, ultimately terminating at the new North Rutland Station on Post Road in Rutland Town. When the first pole was ceremoniously placed in Castleton on 15 July 1957, local photographer, William Bartlett, was on hand to capture the event. In the photograph Frank Tucker was wearing his hard hat, as he stood next to CVPS President Albert A. Cree. Cree, wearing suit and tie, was pointing as the pole was raised.

Apparently during the 1950s, Tucker also tried expanding his business into highway construction projects. Retired CVPS Middlebury District Superintendent, Raymond 'Corky' Douglas, recalled that F.A. Tucker was awarded a major relocation project of U.S. Route 7.



October 1954 – F.A. Tucker line workers pulling in conductors on the Milton to Middlebury transmission line.



15 July 1957 – Placing the first pole on the Whitehall to North Rutland 115KV line. CVPS President Bert Cree points as Frank Tucker (at Cree's left with hard hat) watches his crew raise the pole.



23 October 1957 – Tucker crews continue work on North Rutland to Whitehall line along West Proctor Road.

This new section of road by-passed the small village of Salisbury in Addison County. The long and relatively straight highway, which Tucker constructed, has become known over the years as the 'Leicester Flats' or the 'Salisbury Flats' as the roadway cuts across their town lines. 'Corky' went on to say that, "Tucker lost his shirt on that job.....and 'Tootsie', his wife, had to bail him out!" It was also rumored that Tucker got involved with the construction of a bridge on Vermont Route 107 in Stockbridge at Stony Brook Road. This bridge was designed with a significant curve on a slight incline. From what was generally stated over the years, Tucker did not fare well with this project either. There was also a popular rumor that had been circulating about for years that Frank took on a utility construction job in Southern New England or Southern New York State back in the 1950s. He left Vermont with a large entourage of men and vehicles. He later came back broke on a passenger train. Nonetheless, from the late 1950s through the early 1970s he made up any ground that may have been lost by effectively deploying men and equipment throughout Vermont, New Hampshire, and parts of eastern Canada. For the most part during this era, his only formidable competition was Seaward Construction Company from Maine. As a 'union shop' Seaward could seldom out-bid Tucker on any Vermont jobs.

As unlikely as it seemed, in the early 1960s there were two Vermont communities that still were without electric service. These were the Northeast Kingdom towns of Victory and Granby. In September of 1963, CVPS laid out an electric distribution system for these two townships. There was a large celebration of townsfolk as a CVPS crew raised the first pole. However, Frank Tucker was also among the crowd with then CVPS President Harold Durgin, as Tucker's crews would once again be involved with this project as well. While the CVPS crew may have placed the first pole, Tucker crews would complete the rest of the distribution line construction for these two towns.

It was during June of 1965, that Dave Zsido acquired direct knowledge of F.A. Tucker, Incorporated – General Contractors. He had just completed his junior year at Mount Saint Joseph Academy (MSJ) and was searching for meaningful summer work. Zsido's mother suggested that he contact her friend, Margaret Sagi, who worked for Tucker as a secretary. Zsido and his friend, Larry Cole of East Wallingford, found their way to the Tucker office at 38 Center Street. For both individuals it was the first time that they had completed an employment applica-

tion. Cole was a 1965 graduate of MSJ. Tucker eagerly accepted their applications and assigned them to a crew that would be working in western New Hampshire. The crew foreman was Joseph Cousineau of Middlebury. Two other crew members, who were linemen, were workers named Cook and Chamberlain from the Bristol area. Zsido signed on as a groundman/truck driver, and was paid the then handsome sum of \$1.75 per hour. The work involved salvaging old New England Telephone Company open wire toll circuits. These circuits were comprised of solid bare copper wire, which New England Telephone was scrapping. Copper at that time was bringing about 75 cents a pound.

The typical work week consisted of forty-five hours. Overtime pay was accumulated after forty hours of work only. So the workday was generally comprised of a nine hour day. If it rained, or was oppressively hot or cold, and you didn't work, you didn't get paid. Tucker didn't offer any paid holidays, vacation days, or sick days. So if you didn't work on the Fourth of July, because it occurred during the work week, you lost nine hours of pay unless you worked on Saturday to make up for it. Moreover, there weren't any company insurance programs, such as medical insurance or life insurance. However, if you worked outside the State of Vermont, you were provided with an \$18 per work expense annuity. As small as this amount seems, in 1965, crew members could find a boarding house that provided meals, serving breakfast and supper and often provided a 'brown bag' lunch for about \$15 or \$16 a week. To give this some perspective, at that time, much to the chagrin of smokers, New Hampshire had just raised the price of cigarettes sold in vending machines from 25 to 30 cents per pack.

Within two weeks, Cole and Zsido, who were influenced by a potential 40 cent per hour pay increase to a Third Class telephone lineman rate of \$2.15, decided to test their abilities as linemen. During their half hour lunch breaks, they borrowed their co-workers climbing gear and practiced climbing poles. Shortly thereafter, they purchased their own climbing equipment from Tucker. The complete outfit of climbers, or 'hooks' as they are commonly known, consisting of line belt, safety strap, and complete assortment of line tools cost just over \$125. This amount was reimbursed to the company through a weekly payroll deduction of about \$20 per week. When they had initially been hired the two workers also had to buy their own safety hard hats. These cost about \$8.65 each. Ultimately, with the entire crew climbing poles, the

salvaging project, which had been scheduled to be an approximate six month effort, was completed in less than six weeks. As the job was finished, at least three railroad box cars were filled with coils of salvaged solid copper wire. As part of this telephone retirement work process, the crew also had to pull the poles and remove the hardware contained on them. Since the pole hole then had to be backfilled, much of the old hardware was used for backfilling material and buried at the bottom of the five foot plus deep holes. This included things like colorful glass insulators; metal cross-arm braces; and small pieces of non-copper wire. All such items potentially became future 'buried treasures'.

As somewhat of an aside, a co-worker named Chamberlain, drove most of the crew members to various New Hampshire locations with his 1959 Buick 'Wildcat'. The heavy Buick was powered with a 401 'Nail head' engine that provided some 325HP. As Zsido recalled, on one trip returning home for the weekend from New Hampshire, Chamberlain was in a bit of a hurry. The Buick Wildcat rolled across Route 4 on the 'Sherburne Flats' with its speedometer that registered up to 140 MPH 'buried'. Chamberlain, who was a fan of 'hot cars', upgraded to a new 1965 Pontiac GTO with triple deuces that is, three two barrel carburetors before the end of that summer. The crew foreman, Joseph Cousineau of Middlebury, also had a 'street legal' muscle car that he drove to the various work locations. It was a 1961 Pontiac convertible with a 389 cubic inch engine also equipped with three two barrel carburetors. Joe would frequently visit local drag strips on the weekends and race the car.

Since Tucker then needed to find replacement work for this over-achieving crew, he decided to keep Cole and Zsido together and sent them to a project in Claremont, NH. His feelings were that with their few weeks of climbing experience, Cole and Zsido could handle more challenging work. The Claremont project involved constructing a 115,000 volt transmission line for VELCO from its High Bridge substation in New Hampshire to its Weathersfield substation across the Connecticut River. The project was under the direction of Tucker foreman, Johnny Shackett. This type of construction involved the erection of 'H' frame style pole structures. While Cole and Zsido had become competent with climbing poles that ranged in heights from 30 feet to 45 feet, neither had ever placed their 'hooks' into a sixty-five foot tall pole. On that first Monday morning at the Claremont job, both young men had their first opportunity. Cole climbed one pole while Zsido climbed

the adjacent pole of the 'H' frame structure. After spending that morning working from the top of these poles and looking down on other crew members, who were hand-digging holes for four foot long timber slug anchor placements, they returned to the ground. The two friends walked up to the foreman and advised him that they didn't want to do any further climbing. Zsido reflected on that moment as he thought to himself, "I've just completed my junior year of high school, I would like to live to complete my senior year as well." The somewhat astonished foreman called the office in Rutland to advise them that he had two young linemen who didn't want to climb anymore.

The next phase during that eventful first summer with Tucker found the two workers then headed to Brattleboro. They had now become part of a crew that was unloading lengthy poles; sixty to eighty-five footers from rail cars in the rail yard there. These poles were destined for the 115,000 volt transmission line that would feed from the soon to be completed Vermont Yankee Nuclear Power plant in Vernon. The line would eventually extend from Vernon to the Ludlow area. The other two crew members in Brattleboro were Ralph 'Red Squirrel' Bruno and Percy Patterson, both from the Rutland area. Percy was the driver of the c1947 Ford cab-over engine line truck, while Ralph was the driver of the R Model International tractor trailer unit. Percy and the rather frail Ford truck with an 'A' frame winch-operated boom would lift one hefty pole at a time. Typically while driving the truck forward with a pole that weighed nearly as much as the small truck, the front axle of the truck would be raised off the ground by as much as eighteen inches. Then Ralph would back the trailer under the pole as Cole and Zsido would guide it into its horizontal position. Once the trailer had been loaded with five or six lengthy poles, Ralph would drive the tractor and trailer through downtown Brattleboro and then proceed along Route 30 to the designated pole yard in Dummerston. Since the International truck cab could only seat two individuals, Ralph and Percy, and there wasn't another vehicle to travel with, Cole and Zsido rode on the load of poles the entire distance of better than five miles. On one morning, while traveling along Route 30, a local banker was headed into town with the top down on his Mercury convertible. He became somewhat distracted by the presence of two people riding on the load of poles and drifted off the side of the road, damaging his car by striking a ledge outcropping. After completing this job assignment, the duo spent the remainder of the summer building electric distribution line extensions

in various new residential developments in the Essex Junction area.

In approximately 1966 or 1967, F.A. Tucker relocated the office in Rutland from 38 Center Street to a new complex. This structure may have been once known as the Spencer Building at 135 North Main Street at the intersection with Melrose Avenue. Tucker occupied the entire lower level of the newly constructed complex which was directly south of Buxton's Sunoco station. F.A. Tucker's office staff consisted of a well-rounded crew of individuals. Besides Frank, one other corporate officer was Val Conway, who served somewhat as the Vice President of Operations. Other operating supervisors included Ivon Bergevonne and Michael Irish. The corporate treasurer was Guy Aquilina. Joseph Manfredi reported to him as the assistant treasurer. Staff support was provided by Margaret Sagi, Mary Cole, and Carley Zsido. In terms of field supervisors, this may have included Robert Gragen and Charlie McLean with electrical operations and Bernie Bigelow with telephone operations. Tucker could nearly always be found at work in his office in Rutland, that is, unless he had made somewhat of a weekly trip to his Canadian office location in Montreal. There was a fairly reliable indication that at one time Tucker had the exclusive right for electric utility contract work within the City of Montreal. He also had Canadian outposts in Newfoundland and Nova Scotia, where his company was typically hired to construct major electric transmission systems. On many of the days that Frank was in the Rutland Office, he would have lunch at the Fairmont Restaurant at the corner of Park Street and South Main Street. The Fairmont was one of Rutland's rather well-known upscale dining establishments at the time. It was rumored that Frank, being such a faithful regular customer, had his own booth reserved there, where he might be having lunch with CVPS officials, such as, Albert 'Bert' Cree and Harold Durgin.

Much of Tucker's equipment consisted of used New England Telephone Company line trucks or other similar used pieces. Generally these were equipped with mechanical winch operated 'A' frame boom configurations, which were mounted directly at the back end of the truck. The company's fleet color consisted of a bright yellow cab with an olive drab line body. For the most part, these trucks had generally been extensively used by the phone company and were in average condition for their age. Tucker also introduced a tracked vehicle for large transmission line projects. This unit, manufactured by a Canadian manufacturer, Nodwell, had fiber tracks, some thirty inches in width, which

had steel cleats bolted to the outer surface of the track. The Nodwell was equipped with a digger-pole setting unit that was manufactured by Sterling. On many major transmission jobs he also had other specialized equipment such as John Deere 350 and 450 model bulldozers, and one large International TD-21 crawler with an overhead crane boom. Gilbert 'Sonny' Garvey of Rutland was the sole operator of this monstrous piece of machinery. It didn't matter just how badly 'hung-over' Sonny may have been or may have not been from the previous evenings over-imbibing; he was nothing short of a skilled master at operating the menagerie of control handles required to accurately maneuver this complicated piece. During most of the day, he would be completely drenched in sweat, but always got the job done. Ultimately, it was in the early 1970s, when the company actually purchased two new aerial bucket trucks of its own. Zsido and another driver went to the Albany, NY area to bring the trucks home to Weybridge.

Dynamite was a commonly used explosive, sixty percent nitroglycerin. Each stick was about one and one quarter inches in diameter by nine inches in length. Nearly every pole setting crew carried dynamite and blasting cap magazines with them. On major jobs, the magazines were locked and chained to large trees adjacent to the work site. With smaller jobs they were generally left locked and chained in the backs of the line trucks. Nearly every crew member quickly became familiar with handling dynamite and effectively using it to assist with the hand shoveling of pole and anchor holes. Individual 'blasting licenses' were not required. The workers were simply covered under Tucker's Master Blasting License. Tucker maintained an underground dynamite magazine in Weybridge across the road from his maintenance facility on Sheep Farm Road. Periodically, he would have to replenish the supply and would send a truck to Green Mountain Explosives in Fair Haven. Zsido was assigned this task on at least one occasion. The purchase order was for some twenty cases of dynamite and two carton of blasting caps. He drove down to Fair Haven on Route 30 with one of Tucker's one half ton pick-up trucks, loaded the dynamite into the pick-up's bed; and placed the two cartons of caps into the cab. There wasn't a requirement for any specialized containers and markings on the truck. Somewhat nervous about this 'unique' and potentially dangerous cargo, he headed back up Route 30 to Weybridge. As he drove north he thought, "If this load ever detonated, all they would find is a huge hole in Route 30." One of the major complaints often voiced by workers, who directly handled

the explosives, was the subsequent 'dynamite headaches' that they often experienced.

In the late 1960s, Frank contracted the services of Roy Chase, a CVPS retiree. Roy had been the long-time safety director at CVPS. With the often hazardous nature of the work that Tucker's employees faced on a daily basis, Frank was interested in doing what he could do to bolster safety awareness and reduce lost-time accidents. Roy instituted a requirement for the crew foreman to conduct 'tailboard' safety briefings, which they had to document. On an annual basis, the company would host a company-wide safety conference. A few of these were held at the Jamaica House Inn in Jamaica, VT. As somewhat of a sign of the times, based on the high number of cigarette smokers that were employed, the individual award was likely to be an engraved Zippo lighter. Sadly during Zsido's nine years of part-time and full time work with F.A. Tucker, there had been a handful of employees, who were fatally injured. As Zsido recalled, there were four fatalities during his years there. A foreman named, Ozzie McKay, was electrocuted when a steel telephone messenger cable that was being installed made contact with an energized power line above it. Another foreman named Bob Johnson possibly working in the Wilmington area, was attempting to reach an energized line from his bucket position. He couldn't quite get to it. so he stood on the lip of the aerial bucket; lost his footing; and fell onto the energized line. A lineman named John Pellerin was struck and fatally burned by an energized conductor that slipped from its mounting near Westminster. Billy Pritchard, an equipment operator, was crushed, when he fell from a skidder back-hoe he was operating on a steep right of way corridor near Gaysville. However, some of the more common maladies included poison ivy, blistering sun burns; and also burns or rashes from contact with creosote while working in the sweltering sunlight.

Zsido and Cole parted ways after their 1965 indoctrination with F.A. Tucker, Incorporated. During various times during the eight years that followed, Zsido continued on with the firm. In 1967 or so, Tucker was hired by CVPS to install a distribution line to the top of Grandpa's Knob in Hubbardton. This was the abandoned site of the former wind turbine project of CVPS. Zsido was once again the truck driver of a c1948 Chevrolet line truck, which had just come out of Tucker's paint shop. CVPS provided an inspector on the job, Norman 'Nubber' Nolan of Poultney. Norm was extremely particular about the quality of work, being under-

taken. He would direct Zsido and his truck into the densely brush-covered terrain to assist with the pole setting often at the expense of having black berry bushes with long thorns being dragged across the fresh paint, permanently scratching it. Tucker's field supervisor, Robert Gra-gen, became somewhat incensed upon seeing the superficial damage that had resulted as Zsido tried to diplomatically explain the reason. The small crew was headed by Louis 'Bub' Fortier of nearby Castleton. There was also one French Canadian lineman, Maurice, and a couple of other workers.

Maurice was somewhat of a novice with the use of dynamite often creating far more work than was necessary. He would typically over-load holes that had been drilled into the bedrock with the blasting powder. The resulting detonation would blow away off-set stakes and open a huge chasm, which took forever to back-fill with hand shovels. 'Nubber' was a stickler on back-filling a pole hole. His rule of thumb was "one slow man shoveling dirt back into the hole with two strong men steadily hand-tamping the dirt back into place around the butt of the pole". As the crew was nearing the summit of Grandpa's Knob, Zsido discovered that the old Chevy line truck didn't have the power or gear reduction to make the steep grade in a forward gear. So he had to turn the truck around and back it up to the peak of Grandpa's Knob. The engine was mildly over-heated during the steep grade climb. The last pole was positioned near the remnants of the former wind turbine which CVPS had constructed there in the early 1940s.

This crew went on to work along the planned route of Interstate 89 from White River Junction to Montpelier. The job typically involved placing taller poles beside existing poles that had energized wires on them. The added height was essential to assure adequate clearance for the various road crossings over the new highway system. At one pole location on Back River Road in South Royalton, a 75 foot pole was being placed beside an existing 35 foot pole. The early 1950s Ford truck that Zsido was operating at this location had a front mounted boom, that is, the boom was affixed to the front bumper et al of the truck and not to the rear of the line body. The large pole was considerably more than the little c1950 Ford truck was designed to handle. To assist with hoisting the pole, it was placed in a trench connected to the nine foot hole where the pole would rest. Periodically, perhaps some three times as the pole was being raised, it drifted into the energized line and started on fire.

Each time it did, Maurice would have to put on his climbers and work his way up the pole that was making somewhat of a 45-degree angle with the ground. Once in the proximity of the small fire, he would pat the flames out with his gloves. Perhaps, the largest pole, which was installed on the I-89 road crossings, was one for VELCO at the 115,000 volt feed to the Berlin substation just south of the planned Montpelier exit. Zsido recalled that it may have been a pair of 95 foot poles that were being set in a swampy location under the energized 115 KV line with Tucker's Nodwell. While the entire crew wore their individual rubber gloves during the placement of the pole; the gloves were only rated at 4KV. Tucker routinely had its gloves inspected by utilizing the rubber glove testing program offered by CVPS to periodically test his crew's protective gloves.

For those crews, who were assigned projects within the State of Vermont, Tucker did not offer any compensation for weekly rooms and meals expenses. It didn't matter where the Vermont location was. To a certain degree this policy seemed flawed, for example, a worker could work in West Lebanon, New Hampshire, some fifty miles from Rutland and receive weekly expense compensation. However, if an employee worked in St. Johnsbury, an approximate 100 mile trip from Rutland, he was not compensated. Moreover, no matter where a crew was deployed, the crew was required to be on the job at 7 AM and was not to leave the job until 4:30 PM. Generally speaking, most crews, which worked in Vermont, commuted from Rutland or their homes on a daily basis. So if a worker lived in Rutland and was working in St. Johnsbury, that person had to be in St. Johnsbury at 7 AM. It made for an extremely long day with more than two hours of travel on each side of a nine hour shift. Tucker would make arrangements with a local gas station in various Vermont townships, where the crews could purchase gasoline and also store the company's trucks and equipment overnight.

During the early summer of 1968, CVPS contracted with Tucker to construct a 46,000 volt line to the planned Stratton Mountain substation. The line would originate along Routes 11/30 east of Manchester near the intersection with Toll Gate Road. Once again, Louis 'Bub' Fortier was the foreman in charge for Tucker. Zsido was an equipment operator, generally running a John Deere 350 or John Deere 450 bulldozer. Zsido's main function was to stay well ahead of the pole setting crew snaking the lengthy poles to the survey stake positions where they would be placed. In addition, he had to transport the line hardware

with him and affix it to the poles before they were installed. This typically involved placing two armless insulators and one pole top insulator on each structure. After that rather sizeable crew had been working on the project for a few weeks, a surprise 'visitor' of sorts pulled up onto the remote work site. Access to this extremely far removed right-of-way corridor was from Route 30 in Bondville. It required a trip of more than a mile along a narrow log road through the forest from the landing to the intersection with the right of way. Moreover, travel along the right-of-way had been adversely impacted by a particularly wet June with considerable heavy rains. The 'surprise' guest was none other than Frank Tucker himself. Dressed with his suit, top coat, and felt hat, he was sitting in one of the passenger seats of a three man Bombardier. Frank was drenched from the steady rain that was falling on that day. As he approached and got out of the Bombardier, he yelled to the crew to gather up some wood and build a fire. On his way from Rutland, he had stopped at the Percy P. Wood Store on Lincoln Avenue in Rutland just down Melrose Avenue from his office. He had gone to the meat counter there, talked with meat cutter Paul Courcelle, and purchased a stack of freshly cut T-bone steaks. After cooking the steaks as best the crew members could on the open flames, Frank sat down on a wet log; grabbed a steak; held it with both hands; and said, "Boys, there's only one way to eat this.....like a bear!" He chewed into his steak and grinned.

As this job was nearing completion, the CVPS transmission supervisor, Bill Fee, was spot-checking the final sag of the conductors. At one point about four structures back from the Stratton substation, Bill wasn't satisfied with the ground clearance as a large out-cropping of bed-rock reduced the distance from the ground to the lower conductor. Bill made the determination to shave off the top five to six feet of the exposed bed-rock. Zsido started drilling a series of holes in the rock with a jack-hammer angling them slightly with the intent that a dynamite charge would lift the cap slightly and slide it off the face of the out-cropping. Once he completed drilling, Zsido started to place a small charge in the first drill hole. Bill had wandered back and asked Zsido what he was doing. Zsido advised Fee of his plans to which Fee replied, "Put a full stick in each hole!" Zsido warned Fee that to do so would result in the boulder going off like a grenade as it was all above ground. "Load it up" instructed Fee over Zsido's objections. After doing so Zsido searched for the biggest maple tree he could find to shield him from the torrent of

rocks that he felt would certainly follow. As soon as Zsido hit the detonator, he took one quick look up and then hugged the maple tree that was hopefully going to protect him. The tree was about 150 feet away from the blast. Chunks of rocks the size of bowling balls were rocketing up to two hundred feet or more into the air. Large masses of rocks the size of office desks were flying laterally. One such block struck the newly installed nearby pole, shattering it, and a second one struck and knocked over the portable air compressor that Zsido had used. Rocks could be heard crashing through trees hundreds of feet away for what seemed like minutes! Bill returned chewing on his cigar. Zsido politely said, "I told you so..." Bill did an 'about face' and left.

During the month of December for a couple of years in the late 1960s, ice storms left a considerable portion of the Connecticut River Valley without power as heavily ice-covered trees and trees limbs came crashing to the ground taking power lines with them. CVPS called F.A. Tucker for restoration crews to assist with the recovery effort. Tucker in turn mobilized its work-force, which included rehiring employees who may have been laid off for the winter season. In addition, the company would spare no expense in assuring that the crews had the needed equipment. In the CVPS St. Johnsbury District stockroom, where Tucker crews had mobilized, a Tucker truck arrived with new snowshoes and chainsaws which the workers quickly claimed. The hours, which the crews worked during such a recovery effort, were long and in cold and hazardous conditions. However, during such events, which could require a recovery effort lasting several days, the Tucker crews would be housed and fed. It was not clear if the cost was directly absorbed by CVPS, or if it was billed back to CVPS by Tucker. At one lengthy river crossing, where the electric lines had been knocked down, there wasn't an easy way to get the downed wires back across the river. CVPS sent for its line throwing gun, known as a 'Bridger Gun'. This firearm was successfully deployed during World War II by the U.S. Navy to string ropes and cables between vessels at sea. It was a 45-70 caliber short barrel firearm which launched a sixteen inch brass rod. The brass rod had a sturdy string attached to it. The fired rod pulled the string across a sizeable gap, and then the string was used to pull a rope across the gap. When the CVPS gun arrived at the river crossing, the CVPS officials couldn't find one of their employees who would fire the gun. Tucker superintendent, Bob Gragen, was on the scene and noticed Zsido standing nearby. Bob turned to the CVPS official and said, "Give it to Zsido, he'll shoot the

damned thing!" Although Zsido had never fired that type of firearm before, he pulled the trigger and the launch was successful.

Enduring another cold-snap in December of 1969, Tucker crews were building a transmission line from Gaysville to the planned Sherburne substation. It was an extremely prolonged period of sub-zero temperatures, that is, twenty below zero or colder. The workforce had set up a base of operations on the easterly side of River Road, not far from U.S. Route 4 in Sherburne. Tucker's project superintendent had a dedicated employee, who worked during the off work hours, just to keep the equipment fueled and running round the clock. It was a frigid fact that if the equipment was shut down for any period of time, the operators would never be able to start it again due to the extreme cold. During that period of time in the 1960s, workers typically brought their lunches to work in tin lunch pails or brown paper sacks. Needless to say, that with those frigid temperatures, it didn't take any time at all for their meals to become frozen solid. Often, the workers would have to build small fires to unthaw their frozen foods. If they happened to be near a running piece of equipment, they might have placed their sandwiches on the engine's hot manifold. One 'close call' situation on that slippery hillside involved one of Tucker's tracked Nodwells. As it was being operated on an extremely steep slope, the steel cleats lost their grip. The heavy Nodwell rolled sideways; turning over onto its passenger side. Fortunately, no one was on the passenger side of the equipment and the driver jumped clear before the Nodwell continued its roll. In the process, the passenger side door was sheared from its mounting and was propelled through the interior of the cab. It sailed out of the driver's door just behind the operator. The operator escaped without any injuries. Typically, as the work crews left for the day, they were always hopeful that their personal vehicles would start. Mike Strangeway of the Brandon area was one worker who was always confident that his new car would start. It always did, and Mike and his new Ford Mustang could be seen 'fish-tailing' up Route 4 at the base of the mountain in the vicinity of the white church in Sherburne.

In the midst of another wintery period in early December of 1971, Zsido and his crew were replacing poles in a residential neighborhood near the school of nursing in Brattleboro. The snow was perhaps eight inches deep and it had a stiff-frozen one inch crust. As Zsido began hand digging at the base of the existing pole in the backyard of an adjacent house, he decided to place a small charge of dynamite into the

soft shale he had encountered. The charge was perhaps the equivalent of one half of a stick of dynamite that was dropped loosely into a twelve inch deep hole that had been formed by using a 'johnson bar'. After he detonated the charge, to his astonishment, the hard crusted snow was covered with more than thirty snakes of several different species. Still in shock, the vipers, which had been blasted out of their winter hibernation den, slithered across the snow; looking for a new port of refuge.

It seemed like a Tucker crew was assigned to projects in the Brattleboro area on a regular basis. On a project that involved bringing a transmission line into the Vernon Road substation there for CVPS, Zsido found himself once again working with 'Bub' Fortier. After placing a series of poles and clearing brush for the substation expansion, Fortier decided that the large pile of brush should be burned. Zsido noted that the pile seemed to be rather close to one of the newly installed poles along the edge of the nearby swamp. 'Bub' offered an opinion that the fire shouldn't pose a problem. Shortly after the pile became fully involved with flames, leaping fifteen feet into the air, the nearby pole started 'steaming' from the intense heat at a point about ten feet from the ground. Fearing that the pole might fully ignite, crew members used their hard hats to bail water from the swamp and tossed the murky water onto the heated pole. This slimy technique did in fact save the pole.

As the crew was wrapping up and moving their equipment across Vernon Road to another pole location, 'Bub' asked Zsido to drive Tucker's new Ford tandem digger truck. The 1965 Ford was an F-950 with a big block V-8 engine with a five speed main transmission coupled with a four speed auxiliary transmission. Zsido had ridden in the truck before with Fortier at the wheel. He noticed the technique used by Fortier to split-shift the transmission; placing one hand on each of the two shifting levers. To simultaneously steer the heavy truck, 'Bub' would place his left arm through the steering wheel, lean to the right, and hook the wheel snugly with his elbow. 'Bub' advised Zsido before leaving ahead of him, "Don't try to get fancy with the shifting. Leave the auxiliary stick alone, and only shift the main transmission!"

Zsido climbed into the cab; fired up the Ford; and looked down at the shifting levers. As he released the clutch pedal and started down the road, he thought, "Heck, I can handle both levers." Actually, he made a pretty good try for his first attempt and only ground the gears 'very lightly'. Down the road, Fortier had parked at the next work station, and heard the truck coming and Zsido shifting it. He knew right away

what was taking place. Once Zsido stopped, 'Bub' looked up into the cab and said, "I thought I told you to leave that auxiliary stick alone." Zsido just smiled back, and said, "I guess now I'm a big time trucker!"

One job in the early 1970s found Zsido and his pole setting crew working in downtown Rutland. CVPS was replacing the existing three phase standard construction circuitry with a more compact diamond-shaped wire configuration produced by Hendrix cable. The job extended along the entire length of Wales Street. Then from the junction of Wales Street with West Street it proceeded westerly to Pine Street with the last pole placement being adjacent to Hugh Duffy Coal Company. CVPS had assigned the duties of inspecting the pole-setting work to one of its senior linemen, 'Old' Joe Frankiewicz. Joe became somewhat nervous about Tucker's non-insulated digger-derrick truck setting poles in close proximity to the existing energized lines. After a day or two of observing the crew, he asked to be relieved, and Eddie 'Bones' Trombley took over. The excavation was not without curious discoveries. Stacked blocks of marble and an old trolley rail were unearthed near the Royal Glass store. Further north on Wales Street at its intersection with Center Street, where Shangraw's Pharmacy was located, a sixty-five foot pole had to be installed. This required a hole depth of some eight and one half feet. As the digger truck's auger approached the desired depth; pieces of Rutland's past came back to the surface when the loaded auger was raised. A sizeable clay jug about twelve inches in height was discovered in the dirt. By some stroke of luck it only had a small chip broken from its mouth. The bottle, possibly 1850s in vintage, was an ink bottle. It bore the inscription: "J. Bourne & Son Denby, England". By the strangest of coincidence, just as Zsido was dusting off the bottle, his cousin, a City beat patrolman came walking up Wales Street. The police officer's name just happened to be "John Bourne". Zsido presented the bottle to the obviously astonished officer.

Near the end of the project, the crew was setting a pole in front of the original location of A & J Auto Parts on West Street, next to the California Fruit Market. The auger struck what was initially believed to be solid bed-rock at the curb-side excavation point. As the jack hammer operator drilled into the supposed rock about four inches, the hammer quickly dropped a few feet into the hole. After trying a second hole in a different spot, the same thing happened. Zsido surmised that they had drilled into a city storm sewer. He drove over to City Hall and talked with Lyman H. Styles, who was the City's D.P.W. Commissioner. Zsido

explained the details of the event. However, he was assured by Styles that the storm sewer was more than ten feet from the curb into the street. Zsido wrapped up the job for the day and barricaded the open excavation.

That evening, a typical summer torrential downpour transformed West Street into a river. Zsido drove back by the excavation point and observed water being diverted into the hole, and thought that he would possibly have a real mess in the morning. The next day as the crew returned to that location, they found the hole to be completely dry. Zsido was convinced that they had drilled into the storm sewer. As luck would have it Lyman Styles came driving up West Street headed to work from his home in Proctor. Zsido flagged him down and once again explained his concerns. Lyman once again stood his ground and opined that it was not the storm sewer. As Lyman was about to continue on to City Hall, Zsido advised him, "We're going to load the drill holes with a small charge of dynamite and blast it. We'll be ready to go in about a half hour, should you change your mind." Lyman responded, "Go ahead and do what you have to." The hole was loaded with a small charge and ultimately blasted. As the crew looked back into the excavation, they observed that they had indeed blown a sizeable hole into the top of storm sewer pipe. Zsido headed back to City Hall and the pole placement was postponed while city workers patched the damage.

On another job along Route 25 in the Bradford area, Zsido had been hand-digging a hole that was about 100 feet off the highway. About three feet down he struck water, and decided the most expedient way to complete the six foot hole was to use about one half of a stick of dynamite. The water was about one foot in depth. Usually, with a 'water' hole, especially with the water depth being about a foot, the force of the blast would generally be directed downward and open the excavation quickly to the desired depth. As was sometimes a typical situation, detonators were in short supply and the crew did not have one. Moreover, they only had a coil of blasting cable that was about one hundred feet long. So Zsido carefully loaded the hole; opened the hood on the 1965 Chevy line truck to access the battery; assured that there wasn't any highway traffic; and placed the blasting wire leads against the battery posts. The resulting blast completely flabbergasted Zsido. He looked skyward as the air was filled with rocks resembling something shot from a 'blunderbuss'. The charge wasn't held down by the water, and there wasn't anywhere to run. He tucked his head under the

hood of the truck and hugged the grill of the vehicle. Suddenly there was a loud crashing sound as a rock, about the size of a softball struck the top side of the hood near the windshield. The rock hit with sufficient force; puncturing a four inch diameter hole through the metal hood. It then continued on; ricocheted off the hood; struck the windshield; and cracked it. However, Tucker never repaired the punctured hole in the hood. Unfortunately, it was directly over the Chevy engine's distributor cap. So whenever it rained, water leaked onto the distributor cap causing the engine to skip.

The crew that was working out of the CVPS Bradford office that summer included: Doug Brown, Dennis Cosgrove, and Gary Lee, all of Rutland. There was one additional worker on the five man crew. All the excavations for poles and support anchor rods were done by hand. The poles were placed using that 1965 Chevy line truck with a hydraulic "A" frame boom. In one job area across the Connecticut River in neighboring New Hampshire along River Road in the township of Haverhill, this hard-working crew installed a total of eighteen poles and anchors in one day, somewhat of a record, at least for them.

The work of placing poles and related support structures at times required some ingenuity. In many situations this work was in hazardous and difficult to reach locations. Often, the utility company involved may have saved these jobs specifically for Tucker crews. In one case, while working on the River Road in Sherburne, Zsido's crew had to install an anchor rod and plate to support a pole that had a sharp angle. Unfortunately, the twenty inch square anchor plate had to be installed in a peat bog just off the road. With the soil condition being soft and water-saturated, to say the least, an eight foot anchor rod was required. However, it was nearly impossible to gain any depth digging the location by hand between constant water infiltration and crumbling soil. So the crew acquired two fifty-five gallon drums and cut the bottom off each of them. The first drum was hammered into the desired hole. Then the soft peat material was scooped out with a long handle shovel. Ultimately the second barrel was hammered onto the top of the first drum, gaining a cylindrical depth of more than six feet. Once the required depth of more than seven feet was attained, the anchor plate and rod were installed and the hole was back-filled with every available rock or small boulder the crew could find scattered along the road-side. This arrangement lasted for several years. Then sometime in the 1980s, CVPS Groundman-Driver, Danny King, mentioned to then CVPS employee, Dave Zsido, that they

had just come from a service call in Killington along the River Road, where he had seen quite an unusual site. King noted that conductors had been loaded with heavy wet snow at the sharp corner in the line. The strain was so great that the anchor had pulled out of the ground, bringing the two barrels with it. Zsido admitted to King that he had placed the anchor with that particular failed methodology.

From time to time, Zsido may have been called upon to undertake a special project. On a summer day in the early 1970s, he was asked at the last minute to take a rush order to Tucker's Montreal office. The Canadian operations needed a mobile herbicide spray unit for immediate service. Zsido agreed to take the 'rush order' even though he had never driven to Tucker's Montreal office before. Moreover, he was not adequately briefed on the protocol of crossing through customs. As Zsido was headed north from Weybridge, he tried to calculate the total time that would be required, as he had plans back in Rutland for the evening. He knew that he would have to keep the 1964 vintage International Model 1800 rack truck 'moving' to be on schedule. As he stopped for the Canadian customs checkpoint, he was greeted by a person, who came out, looked at the spray unit, said absolutely nothing; and then disappeared. Zsido waited for a few minutes and then tried to locate the man. Finding no one to speak with, Zsido made the erroneous decision that it must be alright to leave, and off he sped. As he pulled in the Tucker's Montreal maintenance yard, he was met by a mildly hysterical foreman who spoke to him in broken English. He shouted to Zsido that he would have to return to the border. He went on to say, "They chased you for miles but couldn't catch you!" In a calm voice the young Zsido responded, "The only way this truck is going back to the border is empty. They had their opportunity to view the spray unit. They disappeared. So if they want to see it again they can come up here at look at it once it's unloaded." After the thrill of the moment subsided, a telephone call was made by Tucker's superintendent in Montreal back to customs, and customs agreed that it could be unloaded. The trip was also Zsido's last trip to Tucker's Canadian operations.

From the 1960s and for years thereafter, F.A. Tucker had work crews that were dedicated to 'hot line' work, gloving energized conductors using insulated gloves and equipment. This was somewhat in advance of the CVPS gloving program. There were two or three locations in particular, where Tucker had 'hot line' crews: Springfield, Middlebury, and at times in Rutland. These crews were headed by Harold Eaton in the

Springfield area and Robert Desjardins in Middlebury. Both of these Tucker foremen eventually went on to obtain employment with CVPS. As CVPS employees, these men were assigned to the Woodstock and then Royalton CVPS Districts. It was not unusual that F.A. Tucker served as an 'on the job trainer' for many workers, who would eventually move on to be employed by CVPS or other utilities. Zsido discussed that situation with long-time CVPS retiree, Raymond 'Corky' Douglas to compare recollections of such employees. Together they developed the following list, which unquestionably is incomplete: Dave Miller - a former Brattleboro lineman and Superintendent; Bernie Bushee - a former Rutland lineman and Superintendent; Harold Eaton and Robert Desjardins - linemen; Robert Oliver - Middlebury lineman and Field Tech; Wes Hallock and 'Tot' Densmore - Rutland Transmission Department linemen; John Hogan - Transmission lineman and Control Center employee; 'Corky' Douglas - Rutland lineman and Middlebury Superintendent; "Bud" Cox substation electrician and Dave Zsido, who functioned in numerous capacities with CVPS, the longest as Risk Manager. Unquestionably, there were many others, who found their way to CVPS via F.A. Tucker. In addition, at least a few other former Tucker employees with a more entrepreneurial spirit went on to establish their own line construction companies. Bernie Bigelow moved on to establish a small telephone line contracting business called BABCO. Dennis Smith joined forces with a few others to create LMS Construction, another utility line company in Wallingford. Obviously, scores of other former employees found their way into other jobs and professions. As an example, Ed Dumas, a Rutland native, became a professional truck driver and worked for local firms including Romano Brothers Trucking and St. Johnsbury Trucking companies.

In March of 1972, F.A. Tucker, Incorporated was merged with the L.E. Myers Company of Chicago. The transaction was perhaps somewhat in advance of Frank's planned retirement, as Frank stayed on for a period as the President of F.A. Tucker. There was popular sentiment at the time of the merger that what made F.A. Tucker, Incorporated so attractive was its 'lock' on numerous Canadian operations, that is, the F.A. Tucker Ltd operations. Moreover, Tucker also operated a New York State-based contracting company called H-Frame Construction. The Rutland office of F.A. Tucker remained operational for a few years following the Myers merger. Some of the faithful office staff members were offered an opportunity to stay with Myers, but this might require

relocating to the Chicago office. The merger also presented some other unique opportunities it seemed. Michael Irish of the Rutland office tried to recruit Zsido to be a part of a planned work-force deployment to Saudi Arabia where they would be constructing high voltage transmission lines. The deployment would be for a year with a mid-term thirty day break to return home. The pay seemed lucrative at that time. Although Irish persisted with his recruitment effort, Zsido held firmly to his refusal of the 'opportunity'.



Summer -1973 – Tucker pole setting crew in Cornwall.

By sheer coincidence during the summer of 2014, Thursday 24 July to be exact, Zsido met Joseph Manfredi, Tucker's Assistant Treasurer, at the Trak-In Restaurant on Lake Bomoseen. Manfredi had relocated to Myrtle Beach, and was spending a few days back in Vermont. Zsido explained to Manfredi his plans to capture some of the history of F.A. Tucker – General Contractors. Manfredi noted that he would be returning to South Carolina over the weekend. However, he offered to give Zsido a telephone call shortly thereafter. On Sunday 10 August Manfredi made that call and the two individuals traded bits of information concerning the Tucker office staff. Joe confirmed that Frank Tucker was a very generous man. Frank took a sizeable contingent of employees and others to the Fairmont Restaurant every work day. This group would typically include: Guy Aquilina; Val Conway; Yvon Bergevonne;

and Joe. Moreover, Tucker's long-time attorney and close friend, Leonard Wing, from the Law Office of Ryan Smith & Carbine, as well as corporate officers from CVPS might be in the party. Joe noted that, "Frank would buy anything you wanted for lunch including lobster!" Joe finally bowed out on attending these rather fattening luncheons. He confirmed and expanded the list of names of those office employees from the 1960s and 1970s. The sizeable list included: Val Conway; Yvon Bergevonne; Michael Irish; Charles McLean; Bernie Bigelow; Sidney Chandler; Mary Cole; Elsie Graziano; Sue Lambert; Susan Pritchard; Margaret Sagi; Carley Zsido; and of course Joe himself. Joe somewhat concurred with Zsido that typical annual gross annual corporate revenues during that era were possibly in the range of \$9 to \$10 million dollars. Joe also mentioned that Frank had also generously agreed to and actually placed Manfredi within his last will as a benefactor. However, once Joe discovered this fact, he politely requested that Frank change that provision, which he did. Joe also noted that "Tootsie's" proper name was Genevieve. Manfredi also surmised that the merger of F.A. Tucker with L.E. Myers took place in about 1972. The corporate name of F.A. Tucker, Incorporated, although no longer a Vermont entity, continued on for perhaps slightly more than twenty years after it was merged with by L.E. Myers. A series of auction flyers received by Zsido in 1994 described four separate auction locations from the Midwest to New Jersey as the Tucker assets were liquidated between 20 June and 16 August by Joseph Boyle Auctions, Incorporated. The selected auction locations included: Lehi, Utah; Pontiac, Michigan; Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Bridgeton, New Jersey.

On the evening of Wednesday, 21 August 1974, 'Corky' Douglas received a somewhat frantic telephone call from 'Tootsie' Tucker. 'Corky' lived in a residential development essentially in the Tucker's backyard in Weybridge. 'Tootsie' had discovered her husband in an unresponsive condition after he had settled back into his favorite lounging chair following supper. 'Corky' raced to the house and followed the footsteps of the rescue personnel, which had arrived just ahead of him, into the house. The group administered rescue techniques but Frank could not be saved. His death certificate listed his occupation simply as "Engineer". He was buried in the Weybridge Hill Cemetery. Genevieve survived Frank by several years, and died on 1 August 1989 at the age of 87 years.



F.A. Tucker crew doing "hot line" work on Randbury Road tap on Route 7 South in Rutland in the late 1960s. Tucker business office was located at this time at 135 North Main Street.